

Purpose

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Summary: With the Great Gummies returned and peace growing, the Barbics are free to return to their home. However, even with Igthorn no longer a threat, danger still looms. Ursa Barbic gets a reminder of the purpose of her life...

Purpose

With a creak, Ursa pushed open Buddi's door, her eyes darting about the room. For a moment, as it had for the past three times she had checked on him, her heart froze, just a brief heartbeat of time, until her eyes settled on his sleeping form. She crossed the room to bedside of her teenaged son, just watching; only satisfied when his throat flashed and his chest moved up and down several times.

For what felt like the millionth time that night, she let out a deep exhale of relief.

"Mama, how many times are you going to do that tonight?" her son's half amused voice, half-relieved voice cut in her conscience. She glanced downward and her son opened his eyes, halfway, with a crooked smile at her.

Exhaling, again, she took a seat on Buddi's bed, rubbing his head a moment, "Until my heart stops freezing every time you're out of my sight."

Buddi sat up, rubbing some of the sleep out of his eyes, "You can't sleep, can you Mama?"

Ursa groaned and had it been anyone but her son, she would have denied it backward and forward but she could never hide anything from this boy, no matter how much she tried. He always seemed able to figure her out. "I don't think I'll sleep for a while, Buddi._"

Scooting over a bit, the teen laid his head against her chest and she

pulled him close, a vice-like grip around him. "Ursaâ€|Mama, I'm okay. Grubbi gave me a look over â€|three times. I'm okay." Scoffing, he added, "Was my fault in the first place. My guard wasn't up."

Ursa shook her head, then shook her cub, if lightly, "Don't say that, you performed better than most do at your age."

Buddi shifted his eyes upward, "'Mama, it's over, it's done with it. You said it yourself, ambushes happen. Even Barbics are taken by surprise sometimes. And even if we aren't" He added, giving her a pointed look, "Battles are unpredictable."

Ursa didn't respond. Yes, it was true despite their knowledge of war, of battle, of technique, even they could be taken by surprise sometimes. Yes, battles were the definition of unpredictable, of being literally moment to moment. Normally, Ursa could accept that. Heck, she had grown up accepting that as fact.

But not this one. No, she could NEVER accept this one.

Ambushes were not uncommon and this one had even been partially predicted. They had known something was lying in the wake though they were not entirely sure what. Had they a choice, they would have chosen a different route but the path to Ursalia had limited choices and they were delivering some much needed mixed medicines and food to their allies there. They had ot take a few risks for the benefit of time.

Their scouts had stated it looked to be trolls. Not too surprising as they were always the type to wait in places to score an easy steal of treasures. While Barbics and in fact, gummies in general, did not possess such items, it was not a secret trolls carried a heavy dislike for gummies. The feeling was certainly mutual. All the same, a few trolls were deemed a necessary risk to encounter.

It was supposed to be a simple trip from Barbic Woods to Ursalia, bearing supplies much needed by the returning gummies like food and medicine. Granted, there was the added bonus of catching up on the news from the city but the supplies they carried as well as having an experienced healer in Grubbi was much more desired. Communication between the two places was sparse but the need for aid had been determined pretty quickly.

With the woods restored and the gummi cousins from the across the sea returned, Ursalia flourished and their old homestead of Barbic Woods blossomed again. The Barbics were quick to return and restore their motherland to its former glory but they did not abandon the friends they had made in not only the Glen gummies but the returning gummies that repopulated Ursalia, South Gumptom and numerous others. So, a select few had been chosen to accompany Ursa and Grubbi to the city, including Gritti, Lundi, Mardi, and Buddi, who was anxious to see the rumored 'great gummies' again. While the adults chuckled at their only cub's enthusiasm, they did share some of his excitement. Hard not to when your race was deemed alone for so long only for literally hundreds of gummies suddenly flooding back to your lands!

However, when they made their way through the High Mountain Pass, not even three hours from the city, the ambush came.

They were trolls, but trolls armed with new weaponry. Normally, troll weapons were laughable at best but these trolls were different than the ones that roamed about Lorath Wood. They were taller for one, darker in shade and much more dangerous. They carried weapons the Barbics knew but they also possessed an odd combination of weapons new to them but quite easy to figure out the lethality of.

Odd weapons. Crossbow like but they did not shoot darts or bolts but simple hardened shards of obsidian. Sharp and dangerous. Obsidian was hard to come by however, especially in these areas where there were limited areas of volcanic activity. Trolls, even these who seemed much more calculated than their Lorath cousins, had to have gotten the supply from somewhere. From whom and why was a mystery for now though. Despite the advantage, plus the semi-surprise though, they had greatly underestimated their opponents! Barbics were not known as "gummies of war" for nothing!

There were probably ten trolls but Mardi and Lundi were took them down swiftly. Lundi in particular was known for stealth, for seemingly appearing out of nowhere (which made him an excellent sniper shot) and Mardi had speed. He always had been one of their faster fighter which made him hard to hit. He had no trouble dishing out damage to his enemies though!

Ursa and Gritti, likewise, had not become the head of their clan for nothing. When the attack came, they darted right towards them, cutting several of them down with their swords. A few of them they fell before the trolls could even level their weapons. Gritti and Ursa had talent with war, with battle, with weapons and it showed.

Grubbi fought back with his spear. He was older but he had lived through many a battle and one did not forget so easily. His experience made him hard to predict, which was working against the trolls' advantage. If they had expected an easy victory, they were painfully reminded that they would not receive one!

And Buddi, despite being only a teenager, took down quite a few with a sharp aim from his bow. He was not a fan of fighting though he had a mind for strategy that was rare. All the same, his skill with archery was to be envied, especially with his young age. To take down a moving target so quickly, it seemed the bow was to be his weapon of choice. He took to it so naturally

"Buddi! Behind you!"

Mardi's cry was so desperate, so petrified, a cry that Barbics scarcely heard in battle. Ursa instantly jerked to see what caused Mardi such panic and her heart dropped. Her son was half turned, having instantly moved to see what danger approached him. When Barbics called warnings, you listened and he had been raised to respond accordingly.

He turned, seemingly in slow motion to see what approached, to react, to defend

_The single troll behind him fired his weapon at the same time as Ursa screeched her son's name. The troll in front of her lost his

head swiftly to her blade as she tore down the snow splattered mountain cliffs, rushing at her son. Grubbi pitched his spear and it found its mark in a troll's chest, through one and piercing another. Mardi and Lundi made swift work of the only troll remaining._

But not before that last one had hit his mark.

Even as Ursa tore towards her son, she saw the obsidian blade pass through her son's chest, right dead center. It landed not two feet away from him, lodged in the ground. Buddi stared at her, a moment, as if not comprehending. His eyes drifted to his chest as that dark red blood, death blood, instantly began to pump from his chest. He managed to lift his eyes a moment and she thought she saw fear in them, panic, before they glazed and he collapsed to the ground.

"BUDDI!" She reached him first, rolled him onto his back. Her hands became coated in his blood almost instantly as that river poured out of him. She pushed her hands against the wound, such a small entry wound but the path it took—|

It was oozing so much blood, too much blood! "BUDDI, look at me!"

Grubbi reached them by that point and swiftly yanked her off, tossing her aside gruffly as he sought to stop the blood. A bit callous perhaps but he was all-healer now. Much as Ursa had done, he sought to find the wound, slow the bleeding but it was pumping, it was pouring.

Dark red, the horrific shade of death. Tears in his own eyes, he sought to find the source and found to his horror that the obsidian shard, while small, had been large enough and fast enough to tear through the heart muscle itself, tearing it literally in half and opened a horrible gash in the chest cavity. Grubbi could see it through the grisly wound even as the blood literally drained out of Buddi's body. With the split of the heart, the lethal blow had split the aorta, the largest vessel in the body.

Buddi's empty eyes told him enough but all the same, he tried to work a miracle. He tried to find something to stitch, something to compress.

There was no viable heart muscle left to revive, nothing he did would make it beat again. He tried. He tried to find a vessel to patch, a way to make that heart muscle whole again but to no avail.

He worked for a good ten minutes, even when after the first two minutes, he knew the cub was gone.

Worked even as the nearly entire blood supply of their only child spilled onto the snowy ground.

Worked as those frightened eyes never moved, did not blink, did not react, just stared and saw nothing.

As Ursa screeched and yelled at her dead son to "WAKE UP! YOU WAKE UP DAMN IT!"

It was when he finally slumped to the ground, head turned away that realization set in. For him, for Gritti, for Lundi, for Mardi.

For Ursaâ€|

"NO!" The blond haired gummi warrioress yanked her son's limp form into her arms, "NO! BUDDI TIMBA, LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT ME! YOU AREN'T DYING! YOU AREN'T DYING, DO YOU HEAR ME? ANSWER ME! ANSWER ME!" Her screeching gave way to something worse, a heart breaking screech of pain, the kind of pain that is not describable, and makes one crumble. She buried her face into Buddi's blood soaked chest, her hair turning a dirty brown from the blood, tears flowing out of her eyes nearly as quickly as the blood had left him. "ANSWER ME, DAMN IT! MAMA IS TELLING YOU TOâ€|ANSWER ME."

Her entire body began to shake with sobs even as she refused to relinquish her grip on his little body, even as it went cold in her arms, with its nearly entire supply of blood gone. She didn't notice her clan members fallen to their knees, sobbing in the ground just as she was, openly. Didn't hear them praying, beseeching, begging.

She was fixated on her little son even as she rocked back and forth, clutching him tight to her chest, saying, over and over, "Wake up, little leaf. Baby, open your eyes. Open your eyes and look at me. I'm not mad, I promise I'm not. Baby, please, just open your eyes. Look at me. Please. Babyâ€|look at me." Her voice failed her and her head fell, her hair falling like a mourning curtain over her face.

Buddi moved, sliding down to place his head into his mother's lap. "Sorry you had to see that, Mama."

A dry laugh came from the Barbic leader's throat and she stroked the cub's hair. "You're sorry I had to see it, when you had to go through it?" Shaking her head, Ursa laid a gentle hand in her son's brown hair, massaged his scalp a little. "That's just like you, Buddi. Always thinking about everyone but you."

Buddi eyed his mother, turning a bit, "Iâ€|don't remember you crying. Well, I mean, Iâ€|" He groaned, "I guess time passed differently for me. I saw different things than you did. Last thing I remember is feeling the sting in my chest and thenâ€|well, then I saw her."

Ursa raised a brow at her son. Then, she was quiet, stiff, before asking, "Youâ€|saw her?"

Buddi turned onto his back so he looked straight up, eyed her, "You won't ever forget today for one reason. For me, it's anotherâ€|"

Waking up hurt a moment, but only a moment. Buddi had become used to pain over his life but that didn't mean it was pleasant. He wondered briefly what had happened but as his vision cleared and he saw only bland whiteness, he felt sick all over. They had been in the mountains between Barbic Woods and Ursalia, traveling to and fro as they had become accustomed to lately. The mountains may have been empty of a lot of things but there were rocks. There were short shrubs, there were mountain animals that darted about.

Most importantly, there was sky, there was ground.

None of that was here. It was just...white. Everywhere. He didn't feel like he was on land but he didn't feel like he was floating either. Last thing he remembered, they had been ambushed. Had been him, Ursa, Gritti, Lundi, Grubbi and Mardi. He had fallen some of their attackers himself (he was quite good with his bow now!) but then he had heard Mardi call a warning of some kind to him, heard Ursa call something and heard a very faint twang! A sting, almost like when you were stung by a bee or somethingâ€|then...then...

Then, he had awoken here.

Drifting his eyes down, he found himself in the nude (and he certainly had not been before!)but there was a very clear slit wound in his chest, over his heart. A nasty looking wound at that. Not because of its size but where it was, dead center. He felt behind, on his back and felt a similar wound, though it was smaller. The size of those shards the stupid trolls had been firing. When he'd turned, he'd heard the firing first and thenâ€|heard Ursa calling to him... a stingâ€|saw Ursa's pale face for just a moment thenâ€|

So...that was what happened.

He'd died.

No, no he couldn't have died. No way! Yet, he could come up with no other explanation for his current predicament. If he wasn't dead, then why was he nude, why was there noâ€|anythingâ€|here! Yet, on that same token, this was not what he pictured being "dead" to be like either. This wasn't the Blessed Garden (it didn't look like a pitiful garden either or a garden at all!). It wasn't the Damned Desert either (and he was sure he hadn't done anything to end up there!) so...what was going on?

Sorrow suddenly filled him. Dear Gum, Sunni...he wasâ€|she'd been training so hard. He loved to watch her. See her take pride in what she accomplished, to grow stronger, both in body and in spirit. He loved to just watch her sleep or cook or do anything! When they were a little older, after she had passed her testâ€|he was going to ask her, he knew it. To be his mate. He wanted to do a lot of things for her, show her a lot of things. Give her kids eventually.

And Ursa...

_Tears filled his eyes. No, his Fycan had been through enough in her life. The loss of her parents, the loss of the majority of her childhood friends, the loss of their old leader, the loss of Gritti's parents, Gritti's eye, the twenty that fell protecting the Woodsâ€|the Woods themselves(regardless of whether or not they had them back, the memory of that night from Shaza remained) This would...this would kill her.
>He didn't want to leave her alone. Didn't want to leave Sunni alone. Didn't want any of them to hurt. Not like he knew this would do to them!

A light giggle suddenly and it was like it was tangible, wrapping all around him, like a hug from behind, "You've died and the only thing you think about is how it'll affect those left behind? You're so sweet!"

Jumping up and turning, Buddi fell to his knees, nearly to his face almost immediately, shaking, though again, he was reminded that there was no ground to be solid and yet it was! But most importantly, that voice. That voice that was the chirping of birds, the gentle murmur of a brook, the breeze through a tree, the sweetest taste of fresh fruitâ€|all that sound in a single voice with an aura that was warm and generated all kinds of feelings of love and comfort.

_He had heard stories, believed them, but to see...__**her**__...in the flesh._

Less than a foot in front of him, walking to him at a steady but gentle stride. Fur as green as the grass on the first rain of spring, long flowing hair that looked to be all the colors of the rainbow all at once, eyes that sparkled and reflected all colors of nature, like tiny prisms that always shifted from one shade to another. As he was, she wore nothing but her hair always wove about, as if it was alive itself, seeming to form a cloak about her.

"N-Natur..." he breathed, lowering his eyes, Shaking now, he swallowed, "I...I meanâ€|Gentle Naturâ€|Great Naturâ€|"

A musical, beautiful sound (that same sound that seemed to be all the senses in one noise) as she laughed again and stood in front of him, as he sat half crumbled...or would have if there was ground to sit on!

She was short. Had he been strong enough to stand, he surmised she would have only reached his chest. Yet, she seemed much taller, simply by the aura she created. A beautiful, warm light seemed to flow out of her in all directions, making all kinds of wonderful memories flow about. And literally flow! He saw his memories play about them, in full color and sound. He saw Ursa playing with him as a toddler, he saw when he first met Sunni, saw when Gritti was helping him steady his bow. Saw when he crawled into Ursa's bed after their first night in Ursalia and just clung tightly to her. He saw them, heard all voices again, felt their touches. It was as if the memories were happening for the first time again, they were so vivid.

The green furred deity gave such a gentle, delicate smile. She reached forward and grasped him on the cheeks-Great Gum, Natur herself was touching him! He shook, but could not help staring into those gorgeous eyes. So full of loveâ€|warmthâ€|

Suddenly, the white around him turned to what was the most glorious green he had ever seen. Cool running water, clear as glass flowing through the landscape. Huge, towering, healthy trees peered into the sky which was colored in all manner of blues and greens. All about him, he saw gummies. All kinds of gummies, translucent and walking about, happy and at peace.

Oh...so she was leading him to the Garden?

He shifted his eyes from the landscape back to her.

_Now, she wore a beautiful blue gownâ€|no, it was literally the river. It was flowing off of her in currents before it spilled over the grass. Her eyes sparkled with a seemingly endless light that was

not there and her hair was stretching throughout the air, literally forming the sky and then, suddenly, she was leaning forward, until her lips hovered just over the wound in his chest. Looking up at him, she giggled, again, "'You're not done, yet Child.'"

She kissed him, there, on the wound.

And everything went blazing white with all kinds of colors and then he was gone from that place.

Buddi gave his mother a gentle smile, saying, "Itâ€|was amazing, Mama."

Ursa could hardly give a response. She had known, had suspected, that it had to be Natur. Natur, of all the spirits and beliefs they had, she was the center point. Everything revolved around her because she was a creature of mercy, a creature that understood love, sacrifice. But more importantly, Natur was given authority over all the other Ages, over life, over trial, over balance, overâ€|death.

Only Natur could thwart death.

They had sat there for a good ten more minutes in the cold snow, just huddled around their lost one when it happened. Ursa, who refused to let go of her son, felt the entire body, now cold, turn warm in an instant. The body jerked, twitched and she knew that was not a response after death, not like this.

Then, oh, Gumâ€|

Buddi blinked rapidly and his eyes flew open. Not glazed, not white, but shining as bright as ever, darting to and fro. She felt the empty veins in his arms through her vice like grip suddenly pulse when out of nowhere they filled. The fallen chest rose and fell again.

All the color left her face, as she tried to comprehend the miracle in her arms. Her Buddiâ€|

It wasn't until he lifted his hands and brushed her cheeks and said, "I'm okay Mama. I'm okay," that the reality of the situation truly hit her. Heâ€|somehowâ€|was not dead. Yetâ€|he had been. But now he wasn't. Yet..

A warm, beautiful glow, every color of the rainbow settled on her son's chest, right over that wound. It looked like the rays of the sun, shining out in every direction before it receded and vanished right into his chest. It changed shape and became a simple leaf shape before fading to a single shade of green.

The wound was sealed shut.

She heard it. The Thump-thump of his heart.

He was warm again.

He spoke.

He moved.

He breathed.

And the leaf. That simple leaf only meant one thing to them. That was the symbol of their Mercy Age, of beautiful Natur.

Buddi eyed his mother as she processed what he had told her, as she no doubt went over the day's trial in horrific detail. He didn't know what she had seen when he awoke.

After all, he could only process from his point of view.

And quite frankly, even though he had experienced itâ€¦lived through itâ€¦it was still hard for him swallow.

This time, waking up was sudden, jerking like a seizure almost.

Arms that had been tight around him suddenly became vice-like. His eyes opened with a start, seeing white mountains, fallen enemies, broken weapons. And all around him, crouched on the ground, his clan. Mardi, Lundi, Gritti.

Ursa was holding him, Grubbi was to his left.

And they all were white as snow, staring at him.

Looking down, to his chest, he saw blood all over him, staining his fur and chest. It pooled on the ground underneath him, still warm! Gum, it was everywhere. He...he must have bled out. He could see lots of tunics and torn bits of leather that had been pressed against his chest. He shifted his eyes up, seeing pure shock in Grubbi's eyes and then to his mother's.

Ursa had tears staining her face.

He...when did Ursa cry? Had he ever seen her cry? No. Not like that. Not ever like that. Her eyes were red. Her cheeks were drenched. Heck, even her neck! Looking back to Grubbi, he saw the same. And on Gritti the same, and Lundi and...

A warm light suddenly lit up on his chest, blazing all colors. Right over that horrible wound.

Then, as a whirlpool pulled down anything in its current, the light retreated back into his body and centered into a single shape that changed colors until it became a light green shade, the shape of a single leaf, burned into his flesh and fur, as if it were a birthmark.

Natur's mark.

Buddi looked up again, locking eyes with Ursa, who was shaking. Reaching up, he grasped her cheeks, saying, "I'm okay, Mama, I'm okay..."

She shook, a moment more then pulled him into such a sharp embrace, and she sobbed, openly sobbed. Tears running down her cheeks, she looked skyward and screamed, as loud as she could,

_ "Thank you, Great Natur! Thank you! Thank you!"_

Then gradually, Gritti's voice joined hers, then Grubbi's, then Lundi and Mardi and then they were all hugging him and...

_Then, that sweet musical voice again, repeating "Not done yet, child. You're nowhere __**NEAR**__ done yet."_

With both mother and son silent for such a long time, Buddi finally chose to break the quiet in the dark of his bedroom, "What do you think she meant, Mama? That I'm not done yet."

Ursa swallowed, looked at her son seriously, "Exactly what it sounds like. There are things you are still supposed to do, to learn, to achieve. I think that bit is pretty straight forward."

The cub eyed his mother, "Butâ€|why me? I mean, why did she intervene for me and not for someone else? I'm not the first cub to die in battle or war. So why did she spare me?"

Ursa squeezed her eyes shut, still trying to block out the horrible image of her son's empty eyes, of that lifeless face. "Because you're special."

Rolling his eyes, Buddi replied, "You're biased, Mama."

"Damn right, I am." Ursa admitted openly, stroking Buddi's hair again, "Iâ€|Buddi, I don't know why Natur interferes for some and not for others. I don't pretend to know. I don't know why she chose to bring you back from the dead instead of stopping you from dying in the first place. Was it to show herself to you? To make us realize how much you mean to us? To give me another damn reason to hate trolls? I really don't know. I do know that she said you weren't done." She gave him a rare maternal smile, "There's a spirit in you that's rare, Buddi. I don't know how but you're going to do great things. I know, I know, you think all mothers say that but I'm speaking as a fellow gummi, as a fighter, as your leader. You've a mind for strategy, one that I rarely see. You've got the diplomacy that the rest of us lack. More than that though, your heart. There's something damn special about your heart, Buddi."

The cub frowned, eyed his mother, "I don't see it."

Ursa lowered her head, pressed her forehead against his, "Those destined to change things usually don't see it. They just do it."

Buddi sighed, then looked at her, "So how do I figure out what I'm supposed to do? What I'm supposed to change?"

"You don't." She responded simply. "You'll just do it naturally. You're good at that. You somehow, without even trying, take a heart so full of anger and remind it what love feels like, that not everything is going to make you hurt, that it's okay to let go of a past pain to find a new future-"

Buddi wrinkled his nose and interrupted her, "Since when did I do THAT?"

A smile from the barbic leader, "The day you were born. You know what day you share your birthday with, Buddi?"

Shaking his head, he inquired, "No, what?"

"My parents' death day."

Buddi went quiet, then sat up, looked at her so close and saw she was quite serious. "My birthday is the day yourâ€¦" Ursa had never mentioned her parents, except to tell Buddi their names and that they had been killed right in front of her when she was six years old, by humans. He knew they were named Una and Warriio. He knew they had been killed when Ursa was so close the blood stained her face.

Ursa nodded to his stunned face, "For years, all that day meant for me was pain, was anger. Then, this certain little cub came into my life and gave me something else to live for." She tweaked his nose a bit, saying, "You changed that day for me the first time I saw you. We all have a spirit to us Buddi and that affects the way others interact with us, the way we touch others." The Barbic leader didn't reject when the cub sat up completely and moved to sit on her lap. "Remember what we say about gummi births? Hmm?"

Buddi nodded, it was a legend they did not tell often but he knew it. "Gummies are born twice. The body first. Then, when the spirit feels it's accepted, Natur releases it to join the body and the baby cries."

Ursa laid her face into her son's hair a moment, taking in his very much alive scent, "Your spirit chose me. I don't know why it did but it did." Her eyes softened, thinking of that tiny little brown cub she had taken into her arms for the first time so many years ago, "Maybe you knew I needed you."

Buddi smirked, "Well, they say a baby's soul is attracted to its parent's soul. Your soul probably called to mine and I just came." Locking eyes with her, he said, "Like today. You did tell me to wake up, didn't you?"

Ursa didn't respond to that, not at first. She wrapped her arms around her son, rubbing his hair, before responding, "Yeah, I did."

End
file.